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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 005748

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/WE LEVIN; NEA/RA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/30/2013

TAGS: [1Z](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: VATICAN DISOWNS CARDINAL'S IRAQ COMMENTS

REF: A. VATICAN 5666

[1B](#). VATICAN 5643

[1C](#). VATICAN 5321

Classified By: Ambassador Jim Nicholson for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[11](#). (C) Holy See Secretary of State (Prime Minister equivalent) Cardinal Angelo Sodano wrote in a December 20 letter to the Ambassador that comments of Cardinal Renato Martino expressing "compassion" for Saddam Hussein and criticism of U.S. treatment of him after his capture (ref a) did not represent "the mind of the Holy See." Our conversations around the Vatican indicate that there was substantial fallout from the incident. While this does not guarantee that such free-lancing will not be repeated, Curia personnel are now keenly aware that the upper reaches of Vatican bureaucracy were not pleased by Martino's ill-considered statements. End Summary.

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Ambassador Bumps Issue up to the Secretary of State  
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[12](#). (C) After President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace Cardinal Renato Martino caused a stir with comments expressing "compassion" for Saddam Hussein, and criticism of U.S. treatment of him after his capture, the Ambassador had first raised the issue with the new Holy See Foreign Minister Giovanni Lajolo (ref a). Lajolo's unsatisfying response prompted the Ambassador to approach the Holy See's Secretary of State (Prime Minister equivalent) Cardinal Angelo Sodano to register U.S. displeasure. In a letter to Sodano seeking clarification of Martino's comments, the Ambassador pointed out that the U.S. "has treated and will continue to treat Saddam Hussein with the dignity due every human being, and will assure he receives the justice he denied to so many." He added that, "suggestions from responsible Vatican officials of anything to the contrary are a source of considerable concern to my government and to the people of the United States." The Ambassador pointed out that Martino's remarks had been widely interpreted in the international media as representing the official view of the Holy See. (Complete text of letter faxed 12/19 to EUR/WE.)

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Sodano: Comments Not Representative  
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[13](#). (C) Though Sodano was unable to meet the Ambassador in person for two days due to his busy Christmas schedule at the Vatican, he responded promptly to a letter the Ambassador delivered to him on December 18. Sodano's letter clearly distanced the Secretariat of State -- the top level of the Vatican bureaucracy -- from Martino's comments. Sodano wrote that the comments had been "amplified by the press" and could "in reality" only "be understood as an extemporaneous and personal reaction to a question made by a journalist." The reaction, Sodano stressed, "was not inherent to the presentation of the Pontifical document" presented that day. In the final analysis, Sodano concluded, "there is no objective reason to consider these comments as representing the mind of the Holy See." He asked the Ambassador to convey his response to the USG.

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Comment: Martino Chastened?  
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[14](#). (C) Sodano's response to the Ambassador's letter represents a strong rebuke for Martino in a culture in which a reprimand of one cardinal by another is very rare. More than one media contact also informed us that they had received an "unprecedented" call from unnamed "very senior" Vatican officials after receipt of the Ambassador's letter emphasizing that Cardinal Martino's comments were his personal views and did not reflect the views of the Pope, which were contained in his World Peace Day message. One journalist pointed out that in his many years of covering the

Vatican, he had never previously received such an unsolicited clarification from such senior levels of the Curia. Other conversations with high-ranking Vatican Curia officials indicate widespread dissatisfaction with the content of Martino's comments -- which one insider told us he had actually reviewed with his staff before the press conference -- and perhaps even more so with his choice of venue for airing them. While none of this will necessarily prevent

Martino or another maverick from getting "off message" in the future, Curia personnel are now keenly aware that the upper reaches of Vatican bureaucracy and many others in the Holy See were not pleased by the Cardinal's indiscreet remarks.

15. (U) Minimize considered.

NICHOLSON

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